

CHAPTER 7

World Literature, Canon, and Literary Criticism

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There is no doubt that world literature is on the rise and gathering momentum in literary studies everywhere today, not just in the USA and Europe, but also in China, Korea, India, Turkey, Brazil, and many other countries in other parts of the world. We may look at some publications and institutions as indicators of the rise of world literature, though the books and journals mentioned here are not meant to be exhaustive and complete. Publishers like Norton, Longman, and Bedford have all published anthologies of world literature, and Routledge has published a companion to world literature as well as a reader and a concise history. Brill and Wiley-Blackwell also take an active interest in publishing books related to world literature, and there are of course university presses with similar interests.[1] Publication of such books is mostly based on market investigations that gauge readers' interests and demands, as well as on the expectation of a new trend with potential for further research and scholarship. These are publications in English, but there are also publications in other languages, such as the Korean journal *Chigujŏk segye munhak* or *Global World*

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Literature, recently started in Seoul in 2012, and the long-standing Chinese journal in Beijing, *Shijie wenxue* 世界文学 or *World Literature*, which has introduced many works of foreign literature to Chinese readers in translation since 1953. The MLA has a volume on *Teaching World Literature* edited by David Damrosch, and Damrosch's own book, *What Is World Literature?*, first published by Princeton University Press in 2003 and since translated into several languages, has become probably the single most influential text in the study of world literature. Launched in March 2016 and published by Brill, the new *Journal of World Literature* is the first important journal that provides an international forum to the study of world literature with a truly global vision and high aims. Under my editorship, Palgrave Macmillan will publish a book series with the general title *Canon and World Literature*. These publications are, or will be, widely used as materials in courses on world literature offered at many universities, and Harvard's Institute for World Literature (IWL), with David Damrosch as director and inaugurated in Beijing in 2011, continued in Istanbul in 2012, at Harvard in 2013, Hong Kong in 2014, Lisbon in 2015, back at Harvard in 2016, Copenhagen in 2017, and Tokyo in 2018, has become a successful international platform for both theoretical explorations and pedagogical practices of teaching world literature. The IWL has drawn hundreds of enthusiastic graduate students and faculty members from dozens of countries every summer. There is no denying that most books and articles on world literature are published in America and Europe, and mostly in English, and that scholars like David Damrosch are the moving forces behind the renewed interest in world literature, but anyone criticizing the rise of world literature as just another wave of American influence is simply turning a blind eye to the global situation and the broad international effort and collaboration of scholars in different countries from different continents. That is the reason why our International Dialogue and Forum on world literature held at Beijing Normal University was so timely and important and had such a special meaning. This is yet another clear indication that world literature is on the rise everywhere in our world today.

World Literature in Context

Nothing rises without motion or motivation, and there are very good reasons for the rise of world literature. First of all, there is a sort of internal and immediate context for its rise. Beginning in the 1970s, Russian formalism, structural linguistics, anthropology, semiotics, psychoanalysis, sociology, and philosophy provided stimulation, theoretical frameworks,

and innovative approaches to the study of literature. Structuralism and later poststructuralism had a tremendous impact on the study of literature, particularly narrative fiction. Postmodernism, postcolonialism, Marxism, feminism, gender studies, gay and lesbian studies, and many other theoretical approaches brought socially committed positions and concerns to the study of literature. During the 1970s and 1980s, literary theory was making the study of literature an exciting and productive business, though not without some overreaching extremes. By the 1990s and beyond, however, much of literary studies became so overly dominated by theories that literary criticism was turned into a discourse engaged with a lot of critical theories but very little literature. Reading literature became a problem, and literary study was gradually supplanted by cultural studies. This became a serious problem acknowledged in the American Comparative Literature Association's state-of-the-field report 10 years ago. "To be a linguist these days, you do not have to know a lot of languages," as Haun Saussy wrote in that report, "at moments in the last few decades, it has seemed possible to make a career in literary studies without making sustained reference to works of literature."[2] Under such circumstances, it is not surprising that literary studies gradually lost its identity *as literary studies*, and that many scholars started to talk about the crisis of literary studies and of the humanities in general.

The problem was not limited to American universities, however, because whatever is local in the United States tends to become global with America's worldwide influence. For example, Terry Eagleton remarks, not without a certain degree of sarcasm, that "nothing is more indigenously American these days than otherness," because to respect the other is a way to deal with "the intractable ethnic problems in the United States." To be fair, such problems are not just present in the United States, but in the United Kingdom and Europe at large as well. "These home-grown concerns," says Eagleton, "are then projected onto the rest of the globe rather like a cultural version of nuclear missile bases, so that post-colonial others find themselves obediently adopting the agenda of a largely American-bred cult of otherness." This is so because, to put it simply, America is "the nation which sets the academic pace in these affairs."[3] Harish Trivedi, a well-known Indian scholar, holds a very similar view. "Only yesterday," says Trivedi with reference to the study of English literature in India, again not without a degree of sarcasm, "have we begun asking questions about canon, context, relevance, reception, response, the other, the alternative (alter-native?), historicism old and new, orientalism, feminism, and the all-Derriding Theory,

and this for the good reason that such questions began to be asked about English literature in England and America the day before yesterday."[4] That is to say, what the postcolonial others are doing is still, ironically, to follow the agenda set up in academic institutions in England and North America. Even in China, which was never colonized and therefore is not postcolonial in a strict sense, the same problem also exists, though mostly in the study of modern literature and less so in the study of China's classical tradition. I have often heard that students are required to make clear what theoretical approach they are using in discussing any given literary work, and all available theoretical approaches are those from Western academia. What comes out of such a mechanical application of Western theory to Chinese literature is more often than not a dull piece peppered with some critical buzzwords and jargon that have little to do with the Chinese literary text.

World literature is on the rise because it offers a solution to that problem, a welcome opportunity to return to the reading of literature on a much larger scale than ever before. The fact that world literature is having a very warm reception among both graduate students and university faculties—of course, not without critiques and challenges at the same time—shows that most people do love literature, and that the reading, appreciation, and interpretation of great literary works are fundamentally important for our sense of culture and tradition. The rise of world literature responds to the desire for reading literature and satisfies the need of literary criticism. It helps to remind literary scholars that their business is, or should be, first and foremost to make sense of literary works from different traditions in a global perspective, beyond narrowly defined linguistic or national boundaries.

We are living in an increasingly globalized world, and that constitutes an external and larger context for the rise of world literature. Globalization has made it impossible to prevent the flow of information and communication, even though there are also concomitant efforts to hold on to local and national identities, which are not only still relevant, but also powerful and important in today's world. The local and the global create a tension for much of what is happening in our world today, both in positively productive terms and in negatively destructive ways. Whether positive or negative, global connectedness is a fact in contemporary life, and its effect is not only felt in the world's economy and in politics, but also increasingly visible in the study of culture and tradition. The critique of Eurocentrism is first of all the result of social, political, and intellectual developments in Europe and North America in an age of globalization,

which makes it possible for scholars to assume a global perspective far beyond the parochialism of Eurocentric views. Without the critique of Eurocentrism and the awareness of cultural diversity, world literature in a truly global sense would not have its chance to arise. At the same time, the critique of Eurocentrism must not lead to its simple replacement by any other ethnocentrism. In the context of globalization and the critique of ethnocentrism, then, the rise of world literature is not only a tendency in the internal context of literary studies and answering to a teaching need in the institutions of higher education, but also part of a humanistic effort to promote cross-cultural understanding for the peaceful coexistence of different nations and cultures in our world today. The rise of world literature is possible in a world that is open and conscious of its rich cultural diversity, and at the same time world literature helps make the world more open, and more appreciative of its rich legacy in literatures and cultures.

World Literature and a Cosmopolitan Vision

Any discussion of world literature is likely at some point to trace back to the significant originating moment in the early 1820s when Johann Wolfgang von Goethe called for the advent of the era of *Weltliteratur*. It is particularly fitting that we recalled that moment in Beijing because it was in his conversation with Johann Peter Eckermann, in talking about his reading of a Chinese novel, that Goethe famously declared that "poetry is the universal possession of mankind […] National literature is now rather an unmeaning term; the epoch of World-literature is at hand, and everyone must strive to hasten its approach."[5] Under the influence of Johann Gottfried von Herder's (1744–1803) idea of the voices of different peoples articulated in different languages and literatures, the German concept of *Literaturwissenschaft* or the study of literature has a strongly cosmopolitan interest in the world's great variety of literary expressions, including non-European ones. For Goethe, that Chinese novel stood in sharp contrast to European works he was familiar with—the poetry of Pierre-Jean de Béranger, for instance—particularly in the moderation of emotions and the moral propriety of characterization, which he admired in the Chinese work. At the same time, the Chinese novel also appeared to him so congenial and displayed features of such common humanity that Goethe felt a sense of affinity despite the strangeness of a foreign text, and he detected a kind of underlying link that connected literary works of the world's different nations to form one great *Weltliteratur*.

Goethe's concept of poetry as universal made him not only a major poet in the European tradition, but a poet of the world. He certainly thought of himself as rooted in the heritage of the Greco-Roman classical tradition, but his vision was larger than that. Indeed, compared with most of his contemporaries, Goethe had a much wider range of interests in literary works outside Europe, as is evidenced not only in his reading of a Chinese novel, but also in his admiration of the Indian poet Kalidasa's dramatic work, *Sakuntala*, and his appreciation of the Persian poet Hafiz, whose *ghazals* provided inspiration for him to write the *West-östlicher Diwan*. Goethe's concept of *Weltliteratur* thus embodies a cosmopolitan spirit that encompasses the entire range of the world's literary expressions, a cosmopolitan vision of truly global dimensions. But what is cosmopolitanism? Etymologically it comes from a Greek word, *kosmopolitês*, that means "citizen of the world," and as a philosophical concept it may have very different interpretations at different times by different thinkers; but whatever it is, cosmopolitanism is the opposite of parochialism, the negation of ethnocentric tribalism or narrow-minded nationalism. Here I am using the concept of cosmopolitanism as the philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah discussed it, which has two different notions intertwined:

> One is the idea that we have obligations to others, obligations that stretch beyond those to whom we are related by the ties of kith and kind, or even the more formal ties of a shared citizenship. The other is that we take seriously the value not just of human life but of particular human lives, which means taking an interest in the practices and beliefs that lend them significance.[6]

In a way, these two notions or aspects of cosmopolitanism represent the universal and the particular, the global and the local, a general principle and a specific application. At the core of this concept of cosmopolitanism is the principle of extending one's moral sentiments beyond one's own family, friends, group, and nation. In other words, cosmopolitanism means to cultivate the feeling of shared, common humanity with strangers, foreigners, people outside one's own community. Each person has local moorings and local loyalties, but the one thing that cosmopolitans all share, says Appiah, "is that no local loyalty can ever justify forgetting that each human being has responsibilities to every other."[7] Goethe's idea of *Weltliteratur* is cosmopolitan because it is not limited to his own local tradition of European literature, but embraces literatures of the whole world, including Chinese, Indian, Persian, and potentially all other non-European traditions.

Interestingly, in discussing the cosmopolitan principle of extending one's moral responsibilities to strangers and outsiders, Appiah uses "killing a Chinese mandarin" as a conceptual metaphor to illustrate the idea of a moral choice. He cites Balzac's novel *Le Père Goriot*, in which the protagonist Eugène Rastignac asks a friend whether he recalls a passage in Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "where he asks the reader what he'd do if he could make himself rich by killing an old mandarin in China merely by willing it, without budging from Paris?"[8] Appiah suggests that the source of Balzac's idea may come from Adam Smith rather than Rousseau, because "Rousseau doesn't seem to have posed this question."[9] In his famous novel *The Count of Monte Cristo*, however, Alexandre Dumas also refers to "the paradox of Jean Jacques Rousseau, — you know, — the mandarin, who is killed at 500 leagues' distance by raising the tip of the finger."[10] In a learned article, Carlo Ginzburg traces the metaphor to Denis Diderot and particularly to Chateaubriand's popular work *The Genius of Christianity*, in which the author writes, "I put to myself this question: 'If thou couldst by a mere wish kill a fellow-creature in China, and inherit his fortune in Europe, with the supernatural conviction that the fact would never be known, wouldst thou consent to form such a wish?'" The question is almost identical with Rastignac's in Balzac's novel, but Chateaubriand used that hypothetical question to prove the ubiquitous presence of conscience, the conviction that a moral being would never entertain the idea of killing a Chinese mandarin and getting his wealth by mere volition, even if there was no risk of being found out and punished. No matter how one may rationalize the distant killing of a Chinese far from Europe, says Chateaubriand, "in spite of all my useless subterfuges, I hear a voice in the recesses of my soul, protesting so loudly against the mere idea of such a supposition, that I cannot for one moment doubt the reality of conscience."[11] In fact, *tuer le mandarin* or "to kill a mandarin" was a rather popular motif in nineteenth-century European literature and became a proverbial expression in French that implies getting rich by dubious means.[12] For nineteenth-century Europeans, China was a faraway place, and *tuer le mandarin* posed a hypothetical question as "Rousseau's paradox," to which how a European would respond, whether he would entertain the fantasy of distant killing, became a moral choice with philosophical implications.

Another interesting illustration Appiah uses in discussing the moral principle of cosmopolitanism is what he calls the Singer principle. "If I am walking past a shallow pond and see a child drowning in it, I ought to wade in and pull the child out," says Appiah by quoting the philosopher

Peter Singer. "This will mean getting my clothes muddy, but this is insignificant, while the death of the child would presumably be a very bad thing."[13] This is interesting, because what Singer says here is echoing what the Confucian philosopher Mencius 孟子 (385?–304? BC) said more than 2000 years ago in his argument for the basic moral instincts in an inherently good human nature. "Now upon seeing, all of a sudden, a child about to fall into a well, everyone would feel horrified and compassionate not because one would want to make friends with the child's parents, not because one would want to make a reputation among neighbors and friends, nor because one hates to hear the child crying," says Mencius. "From this we may conclude that he who does not have a heart of compassion is not human."[14] The similarity of idea and image here is astonishing. Did Singer know Mencius in translation? It is very tempting to see a connection between the two philosophers, one ancient Chinese and the other modern Australian-American, who both use the image of a child about to drown to argue for the primacy of a moral response. The connection may or may not be real, and we are not here to establish what in the old type of comparative literature is called a *rapport de fait*, but the point is that in both the East and the West, cosmopolitanism appeals to our basic human decency and moral sensibility to form a vision that tries to transcend the natural but dangerous tendency towards self-centered interests, parochialism, and ethnocentrism, and to liberate us to become truly human in the moral and political sense of being fellow citizens not only with those we know as family, friends, and neighbors, but also with those who are strangers, foreigners, and outsiders. World literature in its true sense is or should be part of that cosmopolitan vision, which serves to make us fellow citizens with all those whose literature and culture we appreciate and love as much as our own. World literature demands a global and cosmopolitan vision that always sees beyond our immediate circles and local concerns.

From the very beginning, comparative literature is meant to be open and liberal, transcending the linguistically and culturally homogeneous traditions of national literatures. When it was established as a scholarly discipline in the nineteenth century, however, its scope was largely European, and its linguistic requirement of 10 languages, the *Dekaglottismus* proposed by Hugo von Meltzl, impressive as it is, did not include a single non-European language. In the 1970s, the French comparatist and intellectual René Étiemble already challenged comparative literature's focus on Western Europe, and advocated a much wider scope to include "the Sanskrit, Chinese, Tamil, Japanese, Bengali, Iranian, Arab or Marathi literatures, all,

or at least some, of which had already produced their master works at a time when the majority of the *Dekaglottismus* literatures did not yet exist, or were still in their infancy."[15] More recently, Franco Moretti also complained that comparative literature "has not lived up to" the cosmopolitan idea of *Weltliteratur* that Goethe or Karl Marx had in mind, but has been "fundamentally limited to Western Europe and mostly revolving around the river Rhine (German philologists working on French literature). Not much more."[16] World literature is now trying to change precisely that and make comparative literature true to its own ideal of being cosmopolitan and planetary.

Given the imbalance of power between the West and the Rest in the global economic and political arena, however, it is difficult to get out of the powerful Eurocentric view of the world, particularly for scholars of a powerful and excellent tradition like the French. Many have criticized the Eurocentric bias expressed in Pascale Casanova's idea of *la république mondiale des lettres*, because in her view, world literary history started in Renaissance Italy and then France, and gradually moved to other parts of the world along with the expansion of European power in the nineteenth century, followed by the twentieth-century decolonization of Africa and Asia. She lays a particular emphasis on Paris as the capital of the "world republic of letters," and maintains that her Paris-centered literary space is based on historical facts: "the claim that Paris is the capital of literature is not an effect of Gallocentrism," says Casanova, "but the result of a careful historical analysis showing that the exceptional concentration of literary resources that occurred in Paris over the course of several centuries gradually led to its recognition as the center of the literary world."[17] But surely world history is much longer than the modern period since the Renaissance, and the world as a whole, with important multiple centers, is definitely larger than Paris or France. One may wonder whether Casanova is aware of other centers of cultural and literary resources outside Europe, such as the Persian and the Ottoman Empires, or imperial China, which functioned as a center in the East Asian region long before the European Renaissance. How could "a careful historical analysis" have missed all that and turned such a blind eye to much of the literary world outside France? That is frustrating, but it also illustrates the importance of a cosmopolitan vision in our discussion of world literature today. We now must take the "world" in "world literature" seriously, and as a result any study of world literature must cover a large area across regions, and must consider literary works from different continents. The global cultural cartography is important,

because we must have the consciousness that we are talking about world literature, not a local tradition, not literature of one region, but literature of the entire world.

Canon, Literariness, and Literary Criticism

So what is world literature? Of course, David Damrosch has written a wonderful book on that very issue and, as I said earlier, that book has greatly influenced the way we think of world literature today. First of all, world literature is not and cannot be the simple juxtaposition of all the literary works ever produced in the world. There are simply far too many books to read and no matter how many or how fast one can read, nobody can read world literature in a quantitative sense. "Reading 'more' seems hardly to be the solution," as Franco Moretti remarks. "It has to be different. The *categories* have to be different."[18] Moretti proposes "distant reading" as the method for the study of world literature, particularly the novel, and aims to find patterns in a large amount of literary works. There are of course other ways to conceptualize or reconceptualize world literature. If not all literary works are part of world literature, there must be those that succeed in becoming world literature, and those that fail to do so. There must be differentiation, and how to differentiate is an important methodological issue. As I understand it, the differentiating category Damrosch proposes in his book is *circulation*, for he conceives of world literature as encompassing "all literary works that circulate beyond their culture of origin, either in translation or in their original language (Virgil was long read in Latin in Europe)."[19] Taking this as a working definition, we may see two important elements in this concept: one is *circulation* beyond a literary work's original context, and the other is the *language* in which a literary work circulates. As all literary works are composed in a particular language within a particular national and cultural tradition: be it English, French, German, Chinese, Sanskrit, Urdu, Hindi, Persian, Arabic, Swahili, Hausa, or any other, they are first circulating within limits of that linguistic and cultural community and read by native readers in that condition. A work in that status is local, not global, but it becomes a work of world literature when it circulates beyond its original environment to reach readers outside its native and local condition. In that sense, global circulation becomes a prerequisite for world literature. But a work of literature is always read in a particular language, and when it circulates beyond its culture of origin, it must circulate in a language that has a wide-ranging

currency as the lingua franca of a given area and a given period of time. That is the significance of Virgil as Damrosch's example, because it is a classical work that circulated in its original Latin as Europe's lingua franca from late antiquity till the early modern time. In this part of the world—that is, in premodern East Asia—literary Chinese was the lingua franca widely used not only in China, but also in Korea, Japan, and Vietnam. Certain important works written in Chinese could thus circulate in the East Asian region far beyond Chinese borders.

In the seventeenth century, French competed with Latin for prestige and influence, and it became a lingua franca for artists, writers, and the high society in nineteenth-century Europe. For our world today, there is no question that English is the most widely used language, a contemporary lingua franca used probably by more non-native than native speakers in the world today. As a consequence, then, works written in English have a better chance of circulating globally in the original, and works written in other languages could become known and circulate beyond their culture of origin if they are translated into English. Some scholars resent this "hegemony" of English, and some comparatists, with their disciplinary emphasis on working with the original, object to world literature that makes translation a necessary component. As I see it, there is nothing inherently "hegemonic" about English as a language, because people can use it to express and communicate what they want to say and for their own benefit. I still remember the justification for learning the language of "US imperialism" in China when I was a high school student in the early 1960s, a justification provided by none other than Karl Marx himself: "Eine fremde Sprache ist eine Waffe im Kampf des Lebens (A foreign language is a weapon in the struggle of life)."[20] I still think that is a pretty good justification for learning a foreign language, even though it doesn't have to be for a fight that you learn foreign languages, which can give you so much in opening your eyes and your mind, but for learning about other peoples' cultures, histories, and traditions, and for the possibility of acquiring and cultivating a cosmopolitan vision. As a lingua franca, English empowers whoever uses it, and it is therefore very important particularly for non-native speakers to have a good command of English so that they can use it to have their voice better heard in an international arena. That is of course what people are already doing in China, as in many other parts of the world. In my view, there is also nothing wrong with using translation in the study of world literature either, because no one can read all works of world literature in the original, especially works written in "minor" or

"less studied" languages, precisely the linguistic and cultural areas that world literature is expanding into. The emphasis on translation in world literature thus calls for more knowledge of languages, not less, and knowledge not only of major European languages, but beyond comparative literature's traditional requirement of proficiency in the major European languages, particularly French and German.

As we have seen, the sheer quantity of available works of literature in the world is so huge that it becomes absolutely necessary to have a mechanism of differentiation and selection. David Damrosch makes circulation the mechanism, arguing that "world literature is not an infinite, ungraspable canon of works but rather a mode of circulation and of reading, a mode that is as applicable to individual works as to bodies of materials, available for reading established classics and new discoveries alike."[21] Such a concept is certainly open, flexible, and generous enough to accommodate both individual works and literary genres, both classics and newly discovered gems. Circulation beyond a local context, as we have seen, is the minimum threshold requirement for a literary work to enter the global category of world literature, but circulation per se does not seem to me discriminating enough for the selection of the best works from the world's various literary traditions. I do not think we can equate circulation of books, which is a quantitative notion based on print runs and sales numbers, with the best of books, which is a qualitative notion based on value judgment and critical examination. Many best-selling books may not survive the test of time, and the most popular fiction may not be the best in literary value. It is true that quantity and quality are not mutually exclusive, and some widely circulating books may well be excellent books, but that is to be determined by criticism, not by circulation as such. Of course, value judgment is always difficult, debatable, even controversial, and it is understandable that critical evaluation is not a favorite idea with literary scholars at the present time when literary studies is so often politicized, characterized by contention, controversy, and even conflict, but literary criticism is what we need to differentiate works and select the best among them to form a canon of world literature. Damrosch is right to say that world literature may appear differently with partially overlapping but distinct canons in different countries, for the global concept of world literature will always be realized locally and thus be localized in its actual manifestation. World literature is always poised between the local and the global, the cosmopolitan ideal of universality and the national basis of literary and cultural activities. It is the differently localized world literature

that makes the notion surprising, unpredictable, and stimulating, and thus contributes to the richness of world literature as such.

Criticism, according to Gregory Nagy, comes from the Hellenistic "Alexandrian concept of *krisis*, in the sense of 'separating', 'discriminating', 'judging' those works and those authors that are to be preserved and those that are not," and it is "crucial to the concept of 'canon' in the Classical world."[22] In essence, literary criticism means first and foremost to judge the value of a work of literature. It is likely that where there is literature, there is also such a critical sense, the activity of "judging" the value of works and "separating" or "discriminating" the valuable from the less valuable, and there is likely to be a small number of works judged to be worthy of preservation as the best or the canonical in that tradition. In China, Confucius himself was said to have performed the critical function of selecting 300 poems out of the pool of 3000 to compile the *Shi jing* 诗经 or the *Classic of Poetry*. One of the early critical works is *Shi ping* 诗品 or the *Ranking of Poetry* by Zhong Rong 锺嵘 (459–518), who classified more than 100 poets into three ranks according to certain criteria, and Xiao Tong 萧统 (501–531), Prince Zhaoming of the Liang Court 梁昭明太子, compiled *Wen xuan* 文选 or *Selections of Refined Literature*, the earliest anthology of poetry and literary prose in China, which helps preserve the best of literary works from early antiquity till his own time in the sixth century. In his preface to the anthology, Xiao Tong clearly stated that he would exclude texts from the Confucian classics and other philosophical schools, and also historical writings, for he wanted to include in his anthology only texts judged beautiful and elegant in language, effective in evoking certain moods or emotions, distinguished from those with practical values or for moral education. His purpose was to "reduce the weedy and collect the prime (略其芜秽, 集其清英)."[23] This shows that a concept of literary writing appreciated for its aesthetic values clearly manifested itself in the sixth century in China, and with it also a clear sense of differentiation, the need to separate the canonical works to be preserved in his anthology from those lesser works unworthy of preservation. Literary criticism thus helps establish a certain number of canonical works in a literary tradition, and given the limitation of our life span and the limited number of books we can ever read, we'd better read those that have already been selected and judged the best in the world's different literatures. For me, therefore, world literature is not just literary works that circulate beyond their culture of origin, though that is a prerequisite for world literature, but the collection and integration of canonical works in the

world's various literary traditions, canonical works that have been judged worthy by critics and literary scholars who know those traditions best. As we know so little about world literature, especially non-Western and "minor" literary traditions, aesthetic judgment accomplished through literary criticism would be my differentiating category to distinguish the best from the average, the canonical from the run-of-the-mill, or the classic from the merely popular or fashionable. As Damrosch remarks, world literature can be understood as the classics, as masterpieces, or as windows on the world. I would think that literary canon can be all three, as they are definitely the classics of a literary tradition, the masterpieces among works from that tradition, and also the best windows onto that part of the world. Thus we need literary critics and scholars of different linguistic and cultural traditions to tell us about their own literary canons, to reveal to us the beauty and richness of meaning of their canonical works, to convince us of their literary and cultural values, and to explain to us why we should read them. Otherwise we would not know, and I would argue that much of world literature remains unknown, yet to be discovered, criticized, explored, and canonized.

The value of a literary work can be judged in different ways, and different critics may value a work of literature for different reasons. Psychoanalytic critics may regard literary works as sublimations of repressed sexual desires, Marxist critics may read literary works as disguised ideologies with different class consciousness, and feminists may concentrate on a literary work's representation of gender politics. Such interpretive strategies may all produce some insights and reveal something in literary works that are of value for psychoanalysis, Marxism, or other social and political theories, but they may also easily drift away from literature as such. In my view, literature is first of all the art of language, and the aesthetic experience of reading, the appreciation of the beauty and depth of a great literary work, should be the basis of any critical judgment. What makes literature literary, or what the Russian formalists called "literariness," should be the focus of critical attention. This means first and foremost a concern about the literary language and how it works in a literary text. In this respect, we may learn from Indian or Sanskrit poetics about the centrality of the literary language. "Indian thinking on poetry, which is largely centered around language," as R. S. Pathak argues, "regards poetry primarily as a linguistic organization."[24] Barbara Miller also says that much of traditional Indian literature "is characterized by a preoccupation with the nature of language."[25] The very name of Sanskrit, as Sheldon Pollock notes, means an elevated language "'put together' by

means of phonological and morphological transformations."[26] I believe this is true of all literary traditions, because we value literary works that not only express ideas and emotions, but express them in such beautiful and powerful ways, with a particular set of words, phrases, and images, that we enjoy reading them with great pleasure. Literary criticism should therefore engage literary texts, and give explanation of the ways in which the language of a particular text works.

Paying attention to literary language, however, does not mean a purely linguistic or textual approach to literature with no connection to anything else, for a truly great work of literature always contains more than what is explicitly said in the language of the text, always has relevance and connections to some important social, historical, religious, or philosophical issues of the time, and always has something revelatory about life and the world that would give us a better and deeper understanding of ourselves and of others. One interesting example is the study of the close relationship between language and cognition. Since the innovative, seminal work by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (1980), and several other follow-up works, we now have a much better understanding of how cognition and literary language can be fruitfully studied in mutual illumination. We now see human thinking imbedded in conceptual metaphors, and many themes and their variations in literary language may lead us to have a better understanding of how we conceptualize our world with the help of language, especially literary language. Peter Stockwell calls it "cognitive poetics," which is all about "the study of literary reading."[27] The best kind of literary criticism thus always gives us more than textual analysis, but makes us understand better and deeper the values of the work in a rich context, a context with complex social, political, historical, and intellectual issues. Criticism makes us know better the literary work and its context, the larger cultural, social, and historical context of that work.

Here I would like to come back to the cosmopolitan vision we relate to world literature. If cosmopolitanism means to have a sense of shared, common humanity with people outside one's own community, that would lead to the view that we can all understand each other as human beings with basic similar needs, desires, behavior patterns, emotional responses, and so on, despite even the most entrenched differences in language, history, culture, and belief systems. In fact, differences are obvious everywhere we look, each person looks different from the next with unique fingerprints and DNA molecules even within the same community, and when people from different nations and cultures come together, linguistic and cultural

differences become even more pronounced. And yet, cosmopolitanism tries to emphasize the shared and the common despite all the evident and obvious differences, and the study of world literature, the deep understanding of very different literary works, especially canonical works that represent the values of different traditions and cultures, would be an effective way to bring together what seem to be so foreign and different, and thus help the chance of formulating the cosmopolitan vision. Goethe saw that possibility at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and in our time of global connectedness today, we have the opportunity to accomplish what Goethe called for, to usher in the epoch of *Weltliteratur*.

With many telling examples, David Damrosch has shown us very effectively how "nationalism of the national literary traditions was never as watertight as nationalistic literary histories have often supposed." National literature tends to include only writers and works in the national language and tradition, and not foreign works and translations, even though these foreign works may actually have a greater influence on writers of that national tradition than some of their fellow writers in the same language. Laurence Sterne drew much more inspiration from Rabelais and Cervantes than from earlier English works like *Beowulf* or *The Canterbury Tales*. In China, we mostly think of translation and influence of foreign literature in the twentieth century, but there are fascinating and surprising literary connections in much earlier times. For example, in a ninth-century Tang dynasty collection of fantastic tales, Duan Chengshi's 段成式 (803?–863) *Youyang zazu* 酉阳杂俎 or *Miscellaneous Morsels of Youyang*, we find a version of the Cinderella story with all the essential elements: a beautiful young girl suffers mistreatment by her stepmother; she goes to a party in a pair of "golden shoes (金履)," which are "light as hair and soundless when stepping on stones (其轻如毛, 履石无声)"; she lost one shoe in her haste to rush home; the king trying in vain to find the girl whose foot would fit the shoe; and finally the happy ending when she was found to be the owner of that shoe, and she "walked in those shoes, as beautiful as a being from heaven (蹑履而进, 色若天人)."[28] The eminent translator Yang Xianyi 杨宪益 observes that "this story is obviously the Cinderella story of the West." The girl is called in Chinese Ye Xian 叶限, which, Yang argues, is a transliteration of "the Anglo-Saxon *Aescen*, and the Sanskrit *Asan*," with the same meaning as the English Ashes. English versions of the story are mostly based on

French texts, and Cinderella in English versions wears glass shoes. This is a mistranslation, says Yang, "because the French version has shoes made of hair (*vair*), which the English translator misunderstood as glass (*verre*). Though the Chinese version says 'golden shoes,' it also describes them as 'light as hair and soundless when stepping on stones,' so apparently they are originally made of hair."[29] How could the Cinderella story appear in a Chinese book as early as the ninth century? How did the story get there, and what was the trajectory of its meandering journeys and adventurous transformations in the remote past we know so little about? Here we are not interested in how the Chinese version predated the French Charles Perrault (1697) or the German Grimm brothers (1812) by 1000 years, and how, in any case, the Chinese version originated in a foreign land to the West, probably India or the modern-day Middle East. What is fascinating is that peoples and cultures had such unexpected global connections way before our own time of globalization, and that cross-cultural exchange and communication happened much earlier and on a much larger scale than we might think. The world had long been connected in cultural terms before we thought of world literature.

But ours is probably the more propitious time for the rise of world literature, because we are living in a world that is fast changing, and there are undeniable correlations between the literary and cultural side of world affairs and the economic side. As I have discussed above, the critique of Eurocentrism forms an important background for the interest in the non-Western world and the revival of Goethe's concept of *Weltliteratur*. At the same time, there is also much talk about the boom of the Asian economy and the ascendance of the global South, particularly the rise of China in the world economy and politics. While a truly global perspective on world literature needs to break away from the bias of Eurocentrism, it is also important to guard against narrow-minded nationalism in the other parts of the world, for example in China, especially when its economic and political power grows and plays an increasingly significant role in world affairs. The point of going beyond Eurocentrism is not to replace it with Sinocentrism or any other ethnocentrism. And in this context, we may emphasize yet again the importance of the cosmopolitan vision, which opens our eyes and hearts to embrace not just our own literature and culture, but those of the world as a whole. That is a task for all of us to achieve at the present time.

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